

Off-again, on-again ArtsCrawl is back on

Written by By: Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
Friday, 01 October 2021 05:09



For months now, the Business Improvement District board has been keeping an eye on the COVID-19 situation in McKinley County to see if an October return of ArtsCrawl would be safe. With the proposed October date less than a month away, the BID board spent a significant amount of time during their Sept. 16 meeting discussing whether or not the event should happen in October or if they should wait another month and hold it in November.

The board's Executive Director Francis Bee was against scheduling the event for October. He described the New Mexico State Fair COVID-19 precautions to the board: in order to enter the State Fair, a person was required to show proof of vaccination at the gate, and had to have a negative test result within 48 hours before attendance was permitted.

Bee argued that these checkpoints would not work as smoothly at ArtsCrawl because people enter the event from multiple streets and at different times.

"So, since we do not meet these guidelines, I think it would be unsafe and unwise for us to hold the event in October," Bee said. "I'd rather wait until November."

Bee also stated that he had checked in with the BID's insurance agency and learned that they didn't offer any insurance for transmittable illnesses like COVID-19, chickenpox, or measles.

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“So it would not be insured if somebody got COVID-19 and decided to make an issue of that for the BID,” Bee explained.

In an interview with the *Sun*, the event’s coordinator, Rhonda Quintana, said she understood Bee’s hesitation.

“I think the reason that Francis is kind of worried is because we feel like this is going to be an epic ArtsCrawl because I’m bringing in a national act for one, ... and of course it’s the Halloween ArtsCrawl, which has always been extremely popular, and then the fact that the community has missed ArtsCrawl so much,” Quintana explained.

Quintana said she is expecting about 3,000 people.

Board treasurer Archie Baca Jr. was one of the board members who supported having ArtsCrawl in October.

“I think the show should go on, personally,” Baca said. “If there’s four [entryways] you’ve got all directions covered and you can kind of promote it, decorate your masks, wear your masks, kind of educate it, make it a good time, and make it fun, and just wear your mask.”

Baca noted that COVID-19 numbers in New Mexico are going down, citing that as a reason why the event should go on in October.

On Sept. 20, the New Mexico Department of Health reported 53 new cases of COVID-19 in McKinley County.

Baca suggested that the Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services and the Gallup Indian Medical Center each have booths at the ArtsCrawl, so healthcare professionals could share information about the virus. He also told the board that both hospitals were seeing fewer people with COVID-19.

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Ina Burmeister, development director/executive director at RMCHCS said the hospital had six people in their care for COVID-19 related issues on Sept. 21. She said this number has decreased since vaccines became available. Most of the people who are in the hospital with the virus are unvaccinated. But she added that the numbers fluctuate daily.

Another person who supported having the event was board member James Rich. He explained that those who wanted to have the event weren't against following whatever guidelines were put in place by the city or the state.

"We're still wanting to comply and follow the guidelines, but I don't think it's prudent that we try to create additional layers of potential crisis that doesn't (sic) exist," Rich stated. "I'm certainly looking forward to it, and other people are as well."

Bee argued that if they didn't have the event, it would not cause a crisis.

Rich worried aloud about what type of response they would get if they put measures in place that people considered too strict.

"If it's [a] directive from the city or the state, then that's a different story," Rich said. "But for us to try to implement policy and procedure, it can have a negative backlash all around."

On Aug. 17, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham extended the state's mask mandate, saying that people would be required to wear masks indoors due to the rising tide of COVID-19 infections and the spread of the Delta variant. However, the public health order does not require that masks be worn outdoors.

The board's Chairperson, Anna Biava, argued that if they were going to put on the ArtsCrawl event, she would want it to be as normal as possible, without any more restrictions than those already required by the state.

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“I think if we have the ArtsCrawl, we have the ArtsCrawl,” Biava said. “I think we allow people to come to the ArtsCrawl if they feel they’re safe enough to do so, and if not, I hope that they just decline coming.”

Assistant City Manager Jon DeYoung provided the city staff’s perspective. “As far as putting on the event, I know Maryann [Ustick] did want me to mention that we did just complete our event street, and it would be very nice to start utilizing that in our community for our community members,” DeYoung commented.

Bee still stood by his original suggestion.

“I’m telling my point of view, and from what I’ve read and heard and listened to from the state, it seems like it’s not a good idea,” he stated.

Bee was outvoted. The motion to have the ArtsCrawl without any additional guidelines beyond what the state health order requires was passed.

Quintana said that the organizers would be promoting wearing masks at the event. She praised New Mexicans, saying that for the most part people seem to be wearing masks and getting vaccinated.

According to the New Mexico Department of Health’s website, over 60 percent of all New Mexicans have been fully vaccinated as of Sept. 21.

Quintana celebrated the BID’s decision to hold the event. She said sees it as a great thing for downtown Gallup.

“Personally I’m happy that it’s going on because our downtown is desperate, they need help,”

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Quintana explained. “The construction didn’t help, although it made everything beautiful, it didn’t help the businesses much in battling COVID-19, and trying to keep their businesses open.”

Quintana has big plans for Artscrawl’s October kick-off. She booked a Southern rock band from Phoenix, Ariz. called Christopher Shayne. A scary juggling clown was also engaged to provide entertainment.

The first ArtsCrawl of the year will take place in Downtown Gallup Oct. 9 from 7 pm-9 pm.

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